

# The Cortes Community Ecoforestry System

The CES and the Klahoose have such good momentum and support for a community forest that several different good futures are possible. Here a quick sketch of one of the ways it might unfold. This is a snapshot of the evolving system as it might be in 2003.

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## Option A

In 2003 we have created a new Cortes Community Forest under community management and a new eco-forestry-based wing of the Cortes economy. The forest is managed on sustainable ecoforestry principles. The new eco-forestry economy creates or expands many good Cortes Island jobs, for example:

1. More fine working jobs such as boatbuilding and making cabinets, furniture, picture frames, windows and doors. Cortes wood products are widely marketed in Vancouver, Toronto, San Francisco and New York as well as on the web. In the environmentally aware population of these cities, the Cortes community eco-forestry initiative and the quality of Cortes woodworking are highly respected. The result is high prices for Cortes woodworking products and plenty of demand for any Cortes woodworkers with good skills.
2. More local sawmilling -- both construction grades and fine custom work. Local sawmills have become very good at cutting second growth wood in ways that make it suitable for fine woodwork (e.g. quarter sawing)

3. Ecoforestry logging
  4. Forest stewardship – mapping, planning and biological assessment
- And many less timber oriented businesses that we may not have imagined in 1999. These produce less revenue than the four main aspects of the ecoforestry economy above, but are important part time work for a number of Cortes residents.
5. Decorative arrangements made from materials gathered in the forest.
  6. Gathering forest mushrooms and plants
  7. The virtual boatyard – fixing itinerant boats, especially fine woodwork
  8. Shitake farming
  9. Smoking oysters and fish with alder from the forest

The new eco-forestry economy also creates jobs in business functions such as marketing, bookkeeping, shipping, selling and organizing.

### **The main parts of the Cortes Community Ecoforestry System**

The players in the Cortes Ecoforestry System have evolved into five main categories.

#### **1) The Guides and the Drivers of Change**

**The Cortes Ecoforestry Society and the Klahoose Band** have been the driving forces that established the ecoforestry system on Cortes. Together they negotiated with outside land-holders and defined the principles by which the community forests would be managed. They now guide the system and bring it into harmony with the community should it get off

track. Both are strongly represented on the board of The Cortes Island Timber Cooperative.

## **2) The Cortes Community Forest Cooperative (CCFC)**

The Cortes Community Forest Cooperative is the operating arm of the Cortes community that manages its community forests. It holds title to those lands that formally belong to the community. It protects the places that are off limits for logging in all community forests under its management. It manages areas that produce timber according to the principles of ecoforestry. It regulates recreation and gathering activities on the community forests.

In general we have found that the cooperative works well for managing the land and activities on the land, but that processing the logs once they have been removed from the forest is best done by independent Cortes businesses. This may be because highly aesthetic craft-work cannot be done well by committee or it may be that Cortesians are an independent lot, and prefer it that way. (See Appendix A for some detailed ideas on how the CTC might work.

## **3) The Network of Cortes Forest Based Enterprises**

There is a network of locally owned forest based enterprises on Cortes ranging from sawmills to sculpture, from forest recreation to mushroom growing.

### **Logging**

Although the community manages the forest, much of the actual logging is contracted out to local logging contractors. Six contractors have 80% of the

work. There is much more logging work for Cortes residents since the community forest was created. In part that is because MB never seemed to be very good at finding local contractors and Jenks generally brought in outside crews. Equally significant is the fact that eco-forestry is more labor intensive than clearcutting. There are contracts for thinning, contracts for trimming off lower branches to create knot free wood for future generations, and contracts for handling erosion. In general, it is more work to bring wood out of the forest in the least damaging way.

### **Sawmills**

We do have a community owned sawmill at the south end log yard, but it is mainly used by south end craftspeople to create special cuts from small logs they have just bought. As a result, over 90% of the sawing done on the island is done by private sawmills. We are currently sawing 75% of all the sawlogs coming out of our forest on Cortes. About another 10% of the wood is used on the island without milling for use in round forms such as posts, roof beams and sculpture material. . (value-added just means that someone took a piece of wood and made something worth more than they had to pay for the wood. )

### **Woodworkers**

In 2003, Cortes is already somewhat famous for its fine woodworkers. As mentioned above they make a variety of products from wooden boats to fine doors and windows. Wood from the community forest produces many more jobs per tree when it is made into fine products, and so more woodworking jobs have been created by the community forest than any other kind of work.

Before the community forest, Cortes had many who would be boatbuilders and furniture makers who were building houses. Now many more of them are employed doing the work that they love. They are also adding far more to the Cortes economy than they were when they were building houses with wood from Quadra Builders. (This is what economists call “value-added” meaning that what they sell is worth more than the wood they bought to make it.)

The rapid growth of family owned woodworking businesses on Cortes was supported by two other efforts: The marketing organizations that grew up to sell Cortes forest products and the support for Cortes entrepreneurs from the responsible investment community. More on these initiatives below.

#### *The Cortes Virtual Boatyard*

One of the more interesting enterprises that grew out of the woodworking network is the Cortes Virtual Boatyard. A cooperative enterprise of 20 boatbuilders, it charges visiting boats stiff prices for timely first rate work. The Cortes Virtual Boatyard launch tours the harbor with its famous sign, “Honk for Help: The Cortes Virtual Boatyard can fix it.”

#### **Recreation enterprises**

The greatest recreational benefit to Cortes from the Cortes Community Forest has been the preservation of free recreational opportunities. These range from the joy of walking in a health forest to the spiritual benefits of finding sacred plants and visiting sites sacred to one’s culture.

In addition to all the free benefits, some forest based recreation businesses are beginning to flourish. The birding and moss courses given by various naturalists are selling well. More important to the economy, people attracted

by our forests stay in the motel and bed and breakfasts, they eat in restaurants and buy things from the stores.

### **Gathering**

The preservation of the forests has allowed gathering businesses to flourish. We see mushrooms for sale in roadside stands decorative baskets made here from reeds on the internet.

### **Marketing Organizations for Cortes Ecoforestry Products**

Just as the new eco-forestry economy depends on a healthy forest to supply wood and good press, all the small businesses that have grown up around the forest need strong marketing allies that can bring their products to the world. Although many people are engaged in this activity, one enterprise, The Cortes Second Growth Catalog, made the breakthrough that established Cortes wood products in the minds and buying habits of people in Vancouver, Nashville and New York.

The Cortes Second Growth Catalog began as a mail order catalog and rapidly evolved into a very hot internet site. It initially featured fine wood products from Cortes craftspeople and evolved to include any sort of product or service related to the Forest. Today you can buy tongue and groove flooring, spalted alder bowls, shitake mushrooms, or 50 foot motorboats. With orders coming in from the catalog, craftspeople on Cortes began investing more in their businesses. With new tools and new space, wonderful products emerged. As a result, Cortes is known by architects and interior designers from Vancouver and New York to Paris and Milan.

### **The Island Eco-forestry Investment Enterprise**

The entire expansion of the new eco-forestry economy was made possible by the purchase of the MB lands by the Eco-forestry Investment Enterprise which was brought into being by Joel Solomon. In addition to the Squirrel Cove lands bought by the Klahoose, The Cortes community has so far bought back about 22% of the old MB lands. The remainder is still owned by the EIE, but we hope to raise the funds to purchase the remainder by 2010. The EIE leases the lands to The Cortes Timber Cooperative who manages them.

The cooperative has the right to manage the community forest lands still belonging to the EIE as long as it:

1. pays the annual fee for using the remaining lands and
2. manages them in accordance with eco-forestry principles including a provision that the value of standing timber must not decline.

In general we are very happy with the way the community forest has turned out. The community as a whole enjoys the fact that our forests are still standing. The forest is now supporting a vibrant eco-forestry economy. The community is stronger because we have done this together. The investors are happy because we make our payments and are steadily buying more of the forest each year. We have become a model other communities are copying.